DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 155 HE 015 612

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TITLE Introspection within Chaos: A Refrain for Survival.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Activism; *College Role; *Democratic Values; Demonstrations (Civil); Dissent; *Evaluative Thinking; Higher Education; Intellectual Experience; Political Attitudes; *Political Influences; Political Power; Power Structure; *Problem Solving; Public Policy; Scholarship; Social Action; *Social Change; Technological Advancement

ABSTRACT

The role of the academic community in providing introspection and thoughtful analysis at times of national chaos is addressed. While during the 1960s many campuses debated issues and examined national priorities, little credit has been given to academic leadership for fostering a thoughtful approach to difficult questions relating to national priorities. It is suggested that the academic community may be a hidden and little understood medium for promoting freedom and thoughtful inquiry and that more work needs to be accomplished in this area by the academic community to maintain influence and promote enlightened concepts. Reference is made to the Vietnam War and the civil rights issues of the 1960s. It is claimed that many activists during this period had legitimate concerns that were developed from study and introspection into current events. Thoughtful people attempted to change ingrained, institutional habits through activism. Many educators and students projected democratic symbols (freedom and thoughtfulness) by allowing a continuing dialogue of debate through discussions and demonstrations. Social issues were being addressed by many people from academe, the arts, and concerned citizens. The idea that introspection can be used to solve problems and perhaps institute reform is an important educational resource, a part of the thinking-reasoning process. The importance of a consistent, thoughtful approach now seems more related to the complexities of technology than to the need for major structural changes. The question of productivity within the university and society, and the need for excellence as well are also addressed. (SW)

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INTROSPECTION WITHIN CHAOS:
A REFRAIN FOR SURVIVAL

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HE 015 612

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Introspection Within Chaos:

A Refrain For Survival

Abstract

This essay attempts to portray the academic community as a key element providing introspection and thoughtful analysis at times of national chaos. During the 1960s many campuses were used to debate issues and examine national priorities in a rather thoughtful manner. Little credit has been given to academic leadership for fostering a thoughtful approach to difficult questions relating to national priorities. The academic community may be a hidden and little understood medium for promoting freedom and thoughtful inquiry. More work in this area needs to be accomplished by the academic community to maintain their influence and promote enlightened concepts.

Introspection Within Chaos:

A Refrain for Survival

Educators work within their ethereal knowledge disciplines to perpetuate such general concepts as freedom and thoughtfulness. This is accomplished in an unorganized, almost unnoticed manner within institutions of higher education. Professional educators come to understand this process well. Alfred North Whitehead identified freedom and discipline as two essentials of education. "The only avenue towards wisdom is by freedom in the presence of knowledge," said Whitehead.[1]

Developing and maintaining a functional balance between discipline and freedom is most difficult. One possible result from discipline and freedom is careful, measured behavior under trying circumstances. Thoughtfulness in the form of quiet introspection is often necessary to find a way through difficult, many times, unsolvable problems. At a time when considerable world chaos keeps us busy reacting to pernicious survival problems such as nuclear weapons control and pollution contamination, there does not seem to be much time available for introspection. Indeed, an introspective personality may be viewed as indecisive and hence not responsive or alert to the sweep and power of major events. During the chaotic period of the American Civil War, this accusation was made against Abraham Lincoln by his critics.

Introspection with thoughtful planning is now universally needed to cope with technological chaos created by unpredictable humans. Miguel de Unamuno has put this thought in sharp clear language, "Moreover, the derangements and malaise in our contemporary life suggest that our rationalized technological civilization has come into conflict with our basic human nature."[2] This will probably be a major theme for survival in the technical age, and it will continue to be a dilemma for educators. It is a dilemma for educators, because the balance between freedom and discipline (the essentials of education), and its product, introspection, is greatly influenced by current political factions. There is now an emphasis on discipline over freedom in terms of implicit political priorities. Educators are expected to produce polite but dependable mechanics for a productive, technical labor force. Free thinkers may at times influence others to think, but this can be destabilizing for established and organized hierarchial units (the anti-Vietnam war movement and civil rights groups of the 1960s are good examples). Workers, not thinkers, are usually desired by established authorities.

From a sociological perspective, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann have stated that legitimization of the institutional order is faced with the ongoing necessity of keeping chaos at bay. "All social reality is precarious. All societies are constructions in the face of chaos."[3] Solemn institutional reaffirmations or sheltering symbols are needed as signs for continuing reality according to Berger and Luckmann.

Education can serve as a most significant informal institutional sheltering symbol in terms of keeping chaos at bay. It happens that educated people usually attempt to stabilize events when established orders within society become chaotic and disruptive. In the late 1960s, J. Edgar Hoover, educated but vain and power mad, was allowing the Federal Bureau of Investigation to be a willing tool for political power elites. A police state government was on its way to being established within a frenzied atmosphere in this country. The Central Intelligence Agency, also during the chaotic 60s, was using space satellites to spy on U.S. citizens*-- a clear violation of their charter. Who would expose these serious threats to democracy and freedom? The government could not expose what they secretely authorized and condoned. Many citizens did not understand or comprehend that their liberties were in jeopardy from the government. Thoughtful, concerned educators and their willing students were aroused to action.

Many activists during the 1960s had legitimate concerns that were developed from study and introspection into current events. The chaos of this decade seemed to be at a peak in the year 1968. Events of this year caused considerable lingering unrest and tormoil at a time when our country was attempting to grope through an extreme period of chaotic activity:

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*Some believe this still happens.

--- February 1968, the Tet offensive was launched by North Vietnam. It was symbolic of our inability to control the war, and it helped to bring the anti-war movement to the zenith of their foreign policy influence.

--- April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was shot by James Earl Ray in Memphis. Three days later the capital of the United States was under military occupation. There was a real fear that a violent disruption would take place throughout the country.

--- June 5, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was shot by Sirhan Bishara Sirhan. The hope of liberal extremists and moderates had been killed. Resignation and despair set in.

--- August 1968, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago was the scene of police violence and brutality while attempting to contain overwrought demonstrators. Daniel Walker, in an official report on this violence, said it was a police riot.[4] The elements of law enforcement were temporarily out of control. Reactionary fighting reactionary was displayed on national television. It was a disturbing picture.

Between January 1 and June 25, 1968 there were 221 major demonstrations involving 39,000 students on 101 American campuses.[5] There was unrest due to revelations of suspected government deceit, and there was a sense of great frustration about the Vietnam war and civil rights issues. Thoughtful people were becoming avowed activists and attempting to change ingrained, institutional habits.

As this point, spirited, thoughtful individuals forced some institutional reforms and helped to preserve a portion of our democratic way. This is a subtle but significant counterpoint to Berger and Luckmann's notion of sheltering symbols always coming from within the institution. Being able to correct or adjust distorted national priorities can be seen as a form of sheltering and protecting individual freedoms. Government commitments to fight in Vietnam were being slowly reversed; numerous social concerns were being forced into the political spectrum as identifiable issues that could be attached to concerned candidates. The chaos generated was viewed by many as a necessary reproach or struggle to force a stern but demoniac political system to be responsive, open, and democratic.

Many educators and students were projecting democratic symbols (freedom and thoughtfulness) by allowing a continuing dialogue of debate through discussions and demonstrations. This was done mostly through introspection and thoughtful analysis within a chaotic environment. Police reforms were made with the help of thoughtful social scientists. Social issues were being addressed

by many people from academe, the arts, and concerned citizens. Although the country was sharply divided by the Vietnam war, civil rights, and other issues, there were many hard-working individuals attempting to make necessary changes in order to reach a national concensus.

Michael Polanyi observed that a fragmented society appears adrift, irresponsible, selfish, and chaotic.[6] This was obviously the situation in the United States during the late 1960s, and it also appeared to be that way during Watergate revelations, 1972-1974. Institutional bulwarks of order seeking blind obedience as represented by big government, were being slowly eroded by exposure of individual corruption and misplaced priorities. Serious public indiscretions were being exposed.

There was an understanding among many dissident groups that misguided institutional power must be challenged by another form of power. Classic confrontations were established. The significance of power in the twentieth century has been identified by John Herman Randall, Jr.: "In a world ruled by military power, what other social ideal can men set themselves but naked strength?"[7] Enough political strength was directed against the Vietnam war to force a powerful politician, Lyndon Johnson, not to run for the office of President in 1968. While dissidents marched in the streets, many thoughtful people were writing and thinking in an attempt to quell the chaotic atmosphere. This was done with concern that violence is extremely harmful to a democratic system.

Although the University supplied many dissident students, it also provided a national forum to discuss and debate issues. From the introspective nature of wise scholars, came some thoughtful approaches that helped to moderate chaotic government behavior. Within the bureaucracy of government, it is difficult for the introspective approach to flourish. Bureaucratic work involves rigid, sometimes meaningless routine, within a political hierarchy infused with mediocrity. Thoughtful behavior is often viewed as frivolous or supercilious activity, because it attempts to address difficult long-term goals. Short-range activity with jerky movements directed by bright but simpleminded bureaucrats attempt to please tenuous political forces. Quick, strident reactions are usually required of the bureaucracy.

The idea that introspection can be used to solve problems and perhaps set things right is an important educational resource, a part of the thinking, reasoning process. It requires time and diligence to sort through problems. In the late nineteenth century, European liberalism came to this country as a progressive movement to help make order of chaos.[8] Legislation through political action and informed inquiry helped to create some social stability in this country. At the height of this movement a United States President and former University president, Woodrow Wilson, attempted to use a scholarly form of political introspection to impose reason. Wilson was successful in some areas, but he got caught up and consumed by the chaos of World War I, somewhat like Lyndon Johnson did with the Vietnam war.

The significance of a consistant, thoughtful approach now seems more related to the complexities of technology than to the need for major structural changes. Many people do not understand the dangers of technology. Technical confusion, common and somewhat expected, is also quick and decisive. Millions of people can be killed by nuclear weapons and the entire ecological balance of our planet could be turned upside down. The difficult questions are how to reverse the nuclear arms race and control other satonic technologies. Some thoughtful, reasoned solutions are needed, but who is doing this? Political solutions with technology usually lack thoroughness.

Survival within technically sophisticated countries is a rather hurried and at times chaotic existance. As urbanization spreads and life's pace quickens, the dulling hum of a technical environment can make introspection obsolete and mundane. Thinking, reasoning, and studying issues are replaced with a fast paced routine of hollow accomplishment. An obstreperous life devoid of meaning quickly develops. Technicians contrive to press their products into the harried life style of confused consumers. The complexity of a technical survival creates a need for more technology to control existing synthetic networks.

It is difficult for thinkers, those rare introspective souls, to compete with high speed computers, word processors, and other mendacious forms of technical equipment. The term "productivity" is generally used to demonstrate how data can be

churned out, any kind of data. As the industrial passwork for profit, productivity frequently passes for canned business wisdom and has come to be viewed by many as a national standard for excellence. If a business or public endeavor is productive in terms of raw numbers being processed out, then all seems well. Excellence, however, is quite a different matter. Being excellent and "productive" may not always be possible.

School systems are productive and rather efficient, but do they always foster excellence? Public concern demands higher test scores, literate graduates, and other symbolic standards of excellence; public concern does not usually demand higher salaries to keep excellent teachers. Excellence has an element of quiet introspection about it that often produces a special glow of competence and youthful engagement. People doing excellent work have an inner faith in themselves. Michael Polanyi said, ". . . the craving to understand actuates the whole mental life of man."[9] Unfortunately, many busy people do not take time to understand; they mush through their vacuous daily routine with little desire or need to activate latent mental potential. Live and let live is at one extreme stabilizing mediocracy and at another extreme unstabilizing chaos.

Thinking and reaching beyond the boundaries of the present requires some degree of freedom, knowledge, and creative introspection. "Even without censorship literature and art will not thrive where there are no friendship, no free conversation, no shame and no extravagant dreams."[10] The University can provide

an atmosphere that is capable of producing and fostering talented people with thoughtful approaches to complex problems. But the University also creates a vitiated climate that puffs-up scholarly activity from inflated egos and overrated notions of importance. This sometimes happens through an inbreeding of refined scholarship sheltered by self-serving, subtle nonsense. The University network often feeds on itself to perpetuate hollow sophisticated schemes. Eric Hoffer in his direct way said, ". . .that intellectuals are too self-important and self-righteous to practice the give-and-take vital for the stability of a free society."[11] Give-and-take implies that no one holds the key to truth.

Delmore Schwartz, the brilliant but disturbed poet of the 1940s and 50s, reasoned with a good bit of sorrow that people need a humble approach: "For hesitation and doubt, shame and remorse, fear and trembling, are the best parts of a human being."[12] It may be that hesitation and doubt, shame and remorse, fear and trembling are the ingredients needed for a quiet introspective approach. Too much power, too much self-inflating scholarship, and too much mechanical manipulation may combine to kill off or reduce the introspective spirit. The bright, active, aggressive mind is not necessarily informed of worldly wisdom, nor is it immune from worldly folly or pernicious activity.

While teaching at Harvard in the 1940s, Schwartz came to view his colleagues as pleasant and kindly people sleepwalking through their careers.[13] They were bright and knowledgeable but

lacked direction and purpose. That spark of commitment to an idea or extravagant dream seemed to be missing.

People create ideas and perpetuate dreams through their being. The University can help with a proper scholarly climate, materials, and protective atmosphere, but survival is in many ways a personal dual within the heart. The human spirit can be activated through introspection, and it can also be dominated by dogma.

Notes

1. Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education (New York: The Free Press, 1929), p. 30.
2. Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations translated by Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 367.
3. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 103-104.
4. Daniel Walker, "Rights in Conflict," a report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence quoted by Duane Lockard in The Perverted Priorities of American Politics (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 3.
5. William Manchester, The Glory and the Dream (Boston, Massachusetts, 1974), p. 1131.
6. Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966).
7. John Herman Randall, Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 624.
8. Ibid., p. 633.

9. Michael Polanyi, The Study of Man (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 84.
10. Eric Hoffer, Before The Sabbath (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 83.
11. Ibid., p. 124.
12. Delmore Schwartz quoted by James Atlas in Delmore Schwartz: The LIfe of an American Poet (New York: Avon Books, 1977), p. 80.
13. Ibid.